



IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA  
WAYCROSS DIVISION

RAY NELSON, SR.,

Plaintiff,

CIVIL ACTION NO.: 5:20-cv-33

v.

LAURA NELSON,

Defendant.

**ORDER AND MAGISTRATE JUDGE'S REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Plaintiff filed this action, suing his wife, Defendant Laura Nelson, for breach of contract under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Doc. 1. This matter is before the Court for a frivolity screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A. For the reasons stated below, I **RECOMMEND** the Court **DISMISS** Plaintiff's Complaint in its entirety. Because I have recommended dismissal of all of Plaintiff's claims, I also **RECOMMEND** the Court **DIRECT** the Clerk of Court to **CLOSE** this case and enter the appropriate judgment of dismissal and **DENY** Plaintiff leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* on appeal. I **DENY** Plaintiff's Motion for Leave to Proceed *in Forma Pauperis* in this Court. Doc. 2.

**PLAINTIFF'S CLAIM<sup>1</sup>**

Plaintiff seeks to sue his wife, Defendant Laura Nelson, for breach of contract. Doc. 1 at 3. Plaintiff is currently incarcerated at Coffee Correctional Facility. Id. at 2. Plaintiff alleges

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<sup>1</sup> All allegations set forth here are taken from Plaintiff's Complaint. Doc. 1. During frivolity review under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, “[t]he complaint's factual allegations must be accepted as true.” Waldman v. Conway, 871 F.3d 1283, 1289 (11th Cir. 2017).

Defendant Nelson promised to provide for him during his incarceration. Id. at 5. Plaintiff claims, however, she has now abandoned him for another man and has not sent him money in over two years' time. Id. at 5, 12.

### **STANDARD OF REVIEW**

A federal court is required to conduct an initial screening of all complaints filed by prisoners and plaintiffs proceeding *in forma pauperis*. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A(a), 1915(a). During the initial screening, the court must identify any cognizable claims in the complaint. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b). Additionally, the court must dismiss the complaint (or any portion of the complaint) that is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or which seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. Id. The pleadings of unrepresented parties are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys and, therefore, must be liberally construed. Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972). However, Plaintiff's unrepresented status will not excuse mistakes regarding procedural rules. McNeil v. United States, 508 U.S. 106, 113 (1993).

A claim is frivolous under § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) if it is "without arguable merit either in law or fact." Napier v. Preslicka, 314 F.3d 528, 531 (11th Cir. 2002) (quoting Bilal v. Driver, 251 F.3d 1346, 1349 (11th Cir. 2001)). In order to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, a complaint must contain "sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to 'state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.'" Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (quoting Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)). To state a claim, a complaint must contain "more than labels and conclusions, and a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action will not suffice. Twombly, 550 U.S. at 555.

## DISCUSSION

### I. Failure to State a Claim

Plaintiff complains his wife, Defendant Nelson, has stopped sending him money in prison and has left him for another man after promising not to do so. Doc. 1 at 5, 12. Plaintiff seeks to sue Defendant Nelson in her individual capacity under § 1983 for breach of contract. Id. at 2, 3.

To state a claim for relief under § 1983, a plaintiff must show “the conduct complained of (1) was committed by a person acting under color of state law and (2) deprived the complainant of rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States.” Harvey v. Harvey, 949 F.2d 1127, 1130 (11th Cir. 1992). Consequently, “the under-color-of-state-law element of § 1983 excludes from its reach merely private conduct, no matter how discriminatory or wrongful.” Focus on the Family v. Pinellas Suncoast Transit Auth., 344 F.3d 1263, 1277 (11th Cir. 2003) (internal quotations omitted) (quoting American Mfrs. Mut. Ins. Co. v. Sullivan, 526 U.S. 40, 49–50 (1999)). However, a private actor may qualify as a “state actor” for purposes of § 1983 if one of three conditions is met: “(1) the State has coerced or at least significantly encouraged the action alleged to violate the Constitution (‘State compulsion test’); (2) the private parties performed a public function that was traditionally the exclusive prerogative of the State (‘public function test’); or (3) ‘the State had so far insinuated itself into a position of interdependence with the [private parties] that it was a joint participant in the enterprise[]’ (‘nexus/joint action test’).” Rayburn ex rel. Rayburn v. Hogue, 241 F.3d 1341, 1347 (11th Cir. 2001) (quoting NBC, Inc. v. Communications Workers of Am., 860 F.2d 1022, 1026–27 (11th Cir. 1988)).

Here, Defendant Nelson satisfies none of the three conditions. Based on Plaintiff’s allegations, Defendant Nelson is a purely private person whose actions were not compelled by

the state, a traditional public function, or part of a joint enterprise with the state. Her purely private conduct is simply not actionable under § 1983. See Focus on the Family, 344 F.3d at 1277; see also Lamb v. Gunderson, Civil Action No. CV208-61, 2008 WL 4724818, at \*1 (S.D. Ga. Oct. 24, 2018) (citing Cryder v. Oxendine, 24 F.3d 175, 177 (11th Cir. 1994) (“A § 1983 action alleging a procedural due process clause violation requires proof of . . . state action[.]”)); Farrior v. H.J. Russell & Co., 45 F. Supp. 2d 1358, 1367 (N.D. Ga. 1999) (noting § 1983 requires state action). Therefore, no § 1983 claim can be brought against Defendant.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, I RECOMMEND the Court DISMISS the case in its entirety.

## II. **Leave to Appeal *in Forma Pauperis***

The Court should also deny Plaintiff leave to appeal *in forma pauperis*. Though Plaintiff has not yet filed a notice of appeal, it is proper to address these issues in the Court’s order of dismissal. See Fed. R. App. P. 24(a)(3) (trial court may certify that appeal of party proceeding *in forma pauperis* is not taken in good faith “before or after the notice of appeal is filed”).

An appeal cannot be taken *in forma pauperis* if the trial court certifies that the appeal is not taken in good faith. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3); Fed. R. App. P. 24(a)(3). Good faith in this context must be judged by an objective standard. Busch v. County of Volusia, 189 F.R.D. 687, 691 (M.D. Fla. 1999). A party does not proceed in good faith when he seeks to advance a frivolous claim or argument. See Coppedge v. United States, 369 U.S. 438, 445 (1962). A claim or argument is frivolous when it appears the factual allegations are clearly baseless or the legal theories are indisputably meritless. Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 327 (1989); Carroll v. Gross, 984 F.2d 392, 393 (11th Cir. 1993). An *in forma pauperis* action is frivolous and not

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<sup>2</sup> To the extent Plaintiff intended to assert a state law claim against his wife, the Court cannot discern any basis for jurisdiction over such a claim. Plaintiff plainly does not satisfy the requirements for diversity jurisdiction, as he seeks only \$5,700 from his estranged wife and alleges both he and his estranged wife are residents of Georgia. 28 U.S.C. § 1332; Doc. 1 at 2.

brought in good faith if it is “without arguable merit either in law or fact.” Napier v. Preslicka, 314 F.3d 528, 531 (11th Cir. 2002); see also Brown v. United States, Nos. 407CV085, 403CR001, 2009 WL 307872, at \*1–2 (S.D. Ga. Feb. 9, 2009).

Based on the above analysis of Plaintiff’s claims, there are no non-frivolous issues to raise on appeal, and an appeal on these claims would not be taken in good faith. Thus, the Court should **DENY** Plaintiff *in forma pauperis* status on appeal.

## CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth above, I **RECOMMEND** the Court **DISMISS** Plaintiff’s Complaint in its entirety. Because I have recommended dismissal of all of Plaintiff’s claims, I also **RECOMMEND** the Court **DIRECT** the Clerk of Court to **CLOSE** this case and enter the appropriate judgment of dismissal and **DENY** Plaintiff leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* on appeal. I **DENY** Plaintiff’s Motion for Leave to Proceed *in Forma Pauperis* in this Court.

Any objections to this Report and Recommendation shall be filed within 14 days of today’s date. Objections shall be specific and in writing. Any objection that the Magistrate Judge failed to address a contention raised in the Complaint must be included. Failure to file timely, written objections will bar any later challenge or review of the Magistrate Judge’s factual findings and legal conclusions. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C); Harrigan v. Metro Dade Police Dep’t Station #4, No. 17-11264, 2020 WL 6039905, at \*4 (11th Cir. Oct. 13, 2020). To be clear, a party waives all rights to challenge the Magistrate Judge’s factual findings and legal conclusions on appeal by failing to file timely, written objections. Harrigan, 2020 WL 6039905, at \*4; 11th Cir. R. 3-1. A copy of the objections must be served upon all other parties to the action.

Upon receipt of Objections meeting the specificity requirement set out above, a United States District Judge will make a de novo determination of those portions of the report, proposed

findings, or recommendation to which objection is made and may accept, reject, or modify in whole or in part, the findings or recommendations made by the Magistrate Judge. Objections not meeting the specificity requirement set out above will not be considered by a District Judge. A party may not appeal a Magistrate Judge's report and recommendation directly to the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit. Appeals may be made only from a final judgment entered by or at the direction of a District Judge.

**SO ORDERED and REPORTED and RECOMMENDED**, this 16th day of December, 2020.



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BENJAMIN W. CHEESBRO  
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA